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## Corbyn, Momentum and Socialism

There was an interview recently in the OBSERVER REVIEW magazine with a group of Momentum supporters (18th September 2016). Each person gave their reasons for entering into politics and supporting Jeremy Corbyn for the leadership of the Labour Party. Most were driven by the desire to improve society and to end poverty, inequality and austerity. They wanted something better than the social system in which they currently lived.

However, none of them described themselves as a ‘*socialist*’. Nor did they see the necessity for capitalism to be replaced by socialism. They did not even mention capitalism by name and why it is the cause of the range of social problems they were so keen to eradicate. None questioned the political relevance or usefulness of “*the leader*”. Leaders and leadership appeared as somehow “*natural*” and “*beyond question*”.

## Momentum and Entryism

Momentum was founded in 2015 by the Labour activist Jon Lansman.

According to their website, the Momentum group:

*...exists to build on the energy and enthusiasm from the Jeremy Corbyn for Labour Leader campaign to increase participatory democracy, solidarity, and grassroots power and help Labour become the transformative governing party of the 21st century.*

It also has other political objectives:

*...(to) encourage mass mobilisation for a more democratic, equal and decent society* (Welcome to Momentum 25th October 2015).

Although socialists have no interest in the internecine warfare found in capitalist politics, the conservative media and anti-Corbyn groups within the Labour party have tried to portray Momentum as an “*entryist*” organisation but without much success. Channel 4’s DISPATCHES (19th September 2016) attempted to smear Momentum as an “*entryist*” organisation but even some of Momentum’s own detractors considered the programme nothing more than crude propaganda.

The fear in capitalist political circles, particularly from politicians and the media, is that if Corbyn becomes leader

with the support of Momentum he would threaten Britain's membership of NATO, scrap Trident, break ties with the US and Israel, become pro-Palestinian in foreign policy and take a far less aggressive line towards Putin's Russia. Following the Referendum he is also held responsible by some pro-EU supporters in the Labour Party for "*Brexit*" and "*trashing*" the economic and political interests of sections of the capitalist class they represented.

However, Momentum is neither a socialist organisation nor a socialist movement. Like the Labour Party, it is entirely reformist. It has no intention of replacing capitalism with socialism. Momentum might see capitalism as causing social problems but its answer to these social problems is the enactment of social reform policies not socialism.

Yet reform policies to end the entrenched social problems facing the working class have been a historical failure. The failure of past Labour governments to make any appreciable difference to the workers' conditions is because the profit system must be run in the interests of the capitalist class, and not the working class. And this will remain the case while workers persist in supporting capitalism and capitalist political parties.

Socialists acknowledge the genuine concern by Momentum supporters who want to end the social problems they have identified. However these problems will not be resolved through the Labour Party and they will not be resolved by electing Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

## Corbyn and Reformism

Corbyn's policies are also not socialist but reformist. In fact, they are less ambitious than the policies of the 1945 Attlee government. There are many strands to Corbyn's reforms, each with little or no grounds for success.

First: there is nationalisation of industries like the railways. This is an old policy first put forward by the Tories in the 1840s. If enacted, nationalisation would not remove the need for trade unions to struggle for more pay and better working conditions. In the 20th century, nationalisation made little difference to the situation of the workers. Workers were still exploited, they were still made redundant and they still had to periodically strike against their state employers. Nationalisation was and is just another way of operating capitalism, leaving the workers as an exploited and subject class. Workers have no interest in the capitalist debate over the merits or otherwise of nationalisation and privatisation. Both are two sides of the same capitalist coin.

Second: the implementation of the "*living wage*". The "*living wage*" is a misnomer. The wage is the price of labour power and is constrained by the workings of the wages system. The wages system is a form of rationing and restricts the consumption of the working class to what they need to produce and reproduce themselves as a subject class. What workers need and what their wages will buy are two completely different things. Why should workers want to remain wage slaves? Why remain imprisoned within the labour market? And why remain chained to capital?

Third: there is the question of peace. Corbyn may genuinely want peace but capitalism will never give him peace. War is an outcome of international competition for raw resources, trade routes and spheres of strategic influence. Corbyn cannot assume political power under capitalism without one day having to use military force. War and conflict define capitalism and will define any capitalist government including a Corbyn one.

Fourth: there is the question of social housing. Increased construction of social housing at best would only result in cheaply built dwellings for the working class and lay the foundations for the slums of the future just as they did in the 50s & 60s.

Working class housing is always cramped and utilitarian which do not respond to the real needs of families. They are built in high densities on land often adjacent to railways and motorways without enough provision for housing associations or local councils to afford future repairs and maintenance. Compared with the housing which is enjoyed by the capitalist class and advertised in the Sunday newspaper magazines, working class housing, whether in the private or public sector, will always be second best.

Fifth: education. As with housing, education will remain two-tiered even under a Corbyn administration. The

capitalist class will still be able to afford the best education for their children. The working class will receive Gradgrind utilitarian education to make them fit for purpose for the employment market and class exploitation.

Sixth: health. Even if billions of pounds were spent by a Corbyn government on the NHS, the health care received by the capitalist class would always be qualitatively better than the dismally under-funded health care received by the working class.

Seventh: ending unemployment. Corbyn, like any other politician, cannot prevent unemployment. High levels of unemployment are the result of periodic economic crises and trade depressions. Governments and their economic advisers, particularly the Keynesians, cannot prevent the trade cycle from moving from boom to bust and back again. Job insecurity is the inevitable consequence of this competitive capitalist system of production for profit, with periodic mass unemployment.

Eighth: participatory democracy. Participatory democracy – for example, workers on boards of directors, like in Germany - will always be limited and constrained by the private ownership of the means of production and the necessity of the capitalist class to exploit workers, invest capital and make a profit. Under capitalism the process of expanding value, of accumulating capital for the sake of accumulation, cannot be interfered with. Genuine participatory democracy only begins with the establishment of socialism.

The mistake by individuals in Momentum's is to follow political leaders, both within their own organisation and in raising Corbyn to an almost cult-like status. Leadership is a capitalist political principle and is utterly at odds with the thinking and actions of class-conscious socialists, with, with the process of a socialist organisation and revolution and with how free men and women will organise themselves in a socialist society.

Corbyn's mistake is to believe you can have capitalism without the effects of capitalism. Corbyn believes that capitalism can be made to work in the interest of the working class and can be reformed to become something it can't be. A study of the failure of previous Labour governments shows this only too well and what disappointment followed and will follow again even from even a Corbyn-led Labour government.

Corbyn wants the impossible – “*fair distribution*” of social wealth through reforms on the basis of the profit motive and the private ownership of the means of production and distribution. It is a circle he can never square.

## Socialism

If you want a democratic, equal and decent society you will not find it in capitalism. So where should the energy and enthusiasm of those interviewed in the OBSERVER be directed? Their energy and enthusiasm, allied to a better understanding of the capitalist system we live under. And it should lead them to abandon dreams of reformism and to join in working with socialists in a principled socialist party to establish socialism: the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. That will not be through the Labour Party.

To achieve socialism would mean class-conscious workers thinking and acting for themselves without the need for leaders. It would mean struggling to establish socialism, not to bring about yet more social reforms. And it would mean seeing the Labour Party for what it is: a capitalist political party which can only ever operate in the interests of the capitalist class to the exclusion of the working class.

Only in a socialist system can the problems which now facing workers be solved. Socialism will be a social system in which the means of production and distribution of social wealth will be democratically owned by society as a whole. There will be no buying and selling of the workers' commodity labour-power, there will be no labour market, and there will be no employers and employees. In socialism the wages system will be abolished.

A socialist society would ensure that all people received the best possible health care, the best housing and the best education that society can provide. It would also be enhanced by something denied by capitalism: the realisation of human creativity. It would be an “*association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free*

*development of all” (Marx and Engels, The COMMUNIST MANIFESTO). Socialism will also be a classless society of free men and women in which social and co-operative labour will produce just to meet human needs. Socialism will have no use for leaders and everyone will be able to co-operate in running democratically social affairs – an “administration of things, not people”.*

Socialism will also be worldwide with no artificial frontiers. There will be no wars in socialism; no raw resources to protect, no trade routes to defend and no strategic spheres of influence to maintain. Socialism can be defined by the socialist expression: *“from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”*.

## THE LABOUR PARTY

*A Labour Government administers capitalism for the simple reason that it cannot do anything else. The Labour Party is an organisation which stands for the reform, and not the abolition, of capitalism; it asks for votes to run capitalism and when it is in power it cannot exceed this mandate, even supposing that it had the knowledge and the desire to do so.*

*The labour party does not care about the consciousness – or the lack of it – which is behind the votes which sends it to power. Just like any other capitalist political party, it will accept any support as long as it can achieve its main object of becoming the government.*

*That is why the Labour Party cannot “attempt” to establish socialism; indeed, no political party can do this. Socialism cannot be imposed by a minority led by political leaders; it will come only as the result of a conscious action by the world working class. This action will be backed by the knowledge of what socialism is and how it must be established.*

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# An Old Conservative Question: The Same Socialist Answer

On QUESTION TIME (BBC 1, September 29th 20016) there was this comment made from a member of the audience to the group panellists which included Labour’s Richard Burgeon, Tory, Priti Patel and columnist Rod Liddle:

*"How is it possible to increase wages without simultaneously increasing prices and lowering employment?"*

There was no valid or sound answer from the panellists. Students of political economy they were not. However, for socialists this is a very old conservative question with a very revolutionary socialist answer.

The question once formed part of a discussion on trade union activity that took place at a meeting of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association at the end of April and the beginning of June, 1865.

John Weston, a follower of Robert Owen and an advocate of co-operatives as the way forward for the working class, argued that wage increases not only did not benefit the workers immediately concerned but also harmed workers in other sections of industry by causing a rise in prices.

The Philosopher and political economist, John Stuart Mill was among supporters of this so-called “*wages fund*” theory (see I.I. Rubin, A HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT, Ch. 34. THE WAGES FUND, Pluto Press 1989 edition).

Conservative economists have since added unemployment to rising prices as a consequence of workers struggling for and securing higher wages and salaries. Marx easily demolishes the arguments of “*Citizen Weston*” and his argument

can be found in a useful pamphlet, *VALUE, PRICE AND PROFIT*, discovered with Engels's papers after his death and published in 1898 by Marx's daughter and Son-in-Law; Eleanor and Edward Aveling-Marx.

Marx showed that Weston's theory is at variance with the realities of capitalism. The amount of national production is not a fixed thing nor is the amount of real wages measured by the quantities of commodities they can buy.

Prices and wages are governed by economic laws peculiar to capitalism. Workers and capitalists just cannot do what they want. Neither can governments and economic policy makers (Chapter I, *Production and Wages*).

The price of commodities are not determined at will by either the manufacture or retailer who will always try to sell their commodities at prices determined by market conditions. They will try to sell their commodities as high as the market will bear (Chapter II, *Production, Wages, Profits*).

Unless market conditions change in their favour, the manufacturers cannot raise prices simply because they have had to pay higher wages. If employers could just recoup wage increases by raising prices, there would be no point in their resisting wages claims. However, employers do resist wage claims, particularly in times of stagnation.

Marx went on to show that the effect of a general wage increase would be a corresponding reduction of profits. Though some prices might rise and others fall, a general wage increase would leave the average price level unchanged.

What about the additional point, added to later by conservative economists, that those workers who strike for higher wages will only increase the numbers of unemployed?

Again this was dealt with by Marx in his lecture but we also have over one hundred and fifty years of empirical evidence to draw upon since Marx's death which shows that when capitalism is in an economic boom and capitalists are making profits the last thing they want is for profits to be curtailed by strike action. Employers are only too willing to concede higher pay demands to workers to ensure the continual flow of profits.

Marx, in the second part of his lecture went into the matter in more detail. Marx showed that the value of commodities is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour incorporated in them, not by the wages paid to the working class (Chapter VI, *Value and Labour*).

Workers sell their labour-power or ability to work in exchange for a wage or salary. Marx showed that the value of labour-power bought by employers is different to the use of labour power to the capitalists in the production process. The difference is between paid and unpaid labour (Chapter VII, *Labour Power*).

Unpaid labour is the source of what Marx called "*surplus value*" (Chapter VIII, *Production of Surplus Value*).

Surplus value is the source of the unearned incomes going as industrial profit, rent and interest to the capitalist class and pays for their State to further their interests by producing, for example, erroneous propaganda from economists claiming workers securing higher pay rises cause unemployment (Chapter XI, *The Different Parts into Which Surplus Value is Decomposed*).

The struggle between workers and capitalists for higher wages and higher profits: "*resolves itself into a question of the respective powers of the combatants*" (Chapter XIV, *The Struggle between Capital and Labour and its Results*).

However, readers of *VALUE, PRICE AND PROFIT* learn that there is a sting in the tail, for Marx cautions trade unions with this warning:

*Trades Unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system.*

(<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/.../value-price-profit.pdf>).

Students studying philosophy in the late 1980's were asked to read a useful book THE LOGIC OF REAL ARGUMENTS by Alec Fisher. He gave as an example Marx's rebuttal of Weston. Fisher was no Marxist and his academic field was logic. He went through Marx's argument with a fine tooth comb looking for faulty reasoning. He concluded:

*...Marx/s reasoning is hard to fault however we construe it and that is partly what makes it a fascinating nugget of reasoning ( p. 99 to 110 ch. 7).*

The QUESTION TIME audience would not have heard this compelling Marxian answer from the panellists. The BBC has long dropped the pretence of informing its audience with serious political discussion. Under political pressure from successive governments, the BBC has now resigned itself just to entertain with shallow and inane “*bread and circus*” programmes like QUESTION TIME.

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## Chinese Capitalism in Crisis

The Chinese economic slowdown comes as no surprise to students of Marx. All capitalist countries pass through the trade cycle of boom to bust and then up-turn again. Chinese capitalism is no exception.

Here is Marx:

*...capitalist production moves through certain periodical cycles. It moves through a state of quiescence, growing animation, prosperity, overtrade, crisis and stagnation (Wages, Price and Profit in Selected Works Vol. 1, p. 440).*

Chinese capitalism cannot insulate itself from the economic laws acting on commodity production and exchange for profit. Continuing and increasing economic growth is a fiction of economic textbooks. And the problem in China of profitability and inability to sell commodities is compounded by decades of spending on unfinished building projects that have led to an accumulation of bad debt.

The absurdity and inefficiency of capitalism can be seen in the hundreds of unfinished projects or “*rotten buildings*” as they have come to be known. According to the Chinese government, China currently has two billion square metres of empty residential space – enough to house 100 million people (AL JAZEERA, September 27th 2016).

One worker, Meng Shi Jun, told the journalist from AL JAZEERA:

*The economy is not getting better...The factories are no longer thriving and salaries have not gone up with our(sic) nation's development. It has all changed. How did it come to this? It's terrible.*

Meng Shi Jun should not be surprised. The answer to his question “*How did it come to this?*” is quite simple: capitalism.

Overproduction of commodities - houses, raw materials, cars, and so on - occurs when capitalists produce too much compared to the market demand for goods and services. That is why China, like Ireland and Spain before it, has these “*ghost towns*” and even empty airports which are next to useless because there are no buyers.

The economic crisis facing Chinese capitalism is not unexpected. Suddenly, capitalists in Chinese factories and along the supply chain find they have built up stocks of commodities they cannot sell. They find that they now have too many workers they cannot afford to hire, and so these are put on half-time or stand-by, or are made redundant. Factories are closed or go bankrupt.

The *industrial reserve army*” of the unemployed steadily increases into the millions. Then there long term economic



stagnation with mass unemployment and social consequences - losing homes, family break-ups, suicide, rising crime rates, drug abuse and so on. And since China is now fully integrated into the world's supply chain, the economic problems facing China will also have an impact on industries in other countries as orders dry up, commodities stockpile and the rate of profit begins to fall.

In a socialist system in which there was no buying and selling, goods being produced solely and directly for consumption, the planning of production would need only to secure enough goods, and of sufficient variety, to meet the needs of the population. Producing more than enough, a surplus would not have the disastrous consequences it has in capitalist China of throwing workers out of work, to take their place in the dole queue.

Trying to plan commodities for the market in capitalism is different. It is not sufficient for the company to estimate how large the potential market is for its commodities. The company also has to guess the productive capacity of its rivals at home and abroad, and their capacity to undersell at prices lower than the business's own commodities. The consequence is that effective planning for the market under capitalism is impossible.

And this brings us on to the lame excuses for recurring economic crises made by governments and their economic advisers. In each depression, the economists, politicians and capitalists study the evidence, decide what caused the economic crisis and declare that it will never be allowed to happen again: idle words indeed. Governments do not run the economy; it is the other way around. And there is no way anyone can guarantee the same thing – or something very like it – will ever happen again.

In particular how can capitalism secure the harmonious and parallel expansion of different branches of industry, and the full employment of the working class, without which capitalism cannot enable the whole product of industry to be continually consumed? Capitalism does not work this way. Capitalist production is without plan or order; it is anarchic.

Each capitalist – each enterprise - decides what and how much is to be produced, whether output should be increased, maintained, or reduced, maintained or cut down. The capitalists' decisions are guided by their ability or otherwise to sell their commodities at profitable prices and their expectations of finding profitable markets in the future.

Capitalists are not in co-operation with one another but in competition. Governments likewise have no knowledge of the minds of buyers from abroad who might switch from one country to another. Different countries are also in competition with one another.

What exists is the blind law of the market. "*Anarchy*", wrote Engels, "*reigns in (capitalist) social production*" (ANTI-DUHRING, p. 299 Moscow edition).

So long as the capitalist system lasts, it will remain anarchic and immune to reforms meeting the interest of the working class. It will continue to be subject to unpredictable ups and downs as once booming markets reach saturation. And workers who depend on their pay packets find themselves declared “redundant” – surplus to requirement, unwanted. Any plans they had for the future or for their children's prospects have to be revised or ditched.

And while their billionaire former employers sail off into the sunset on their luxury super-yachts, their former employees will be lucky if they can land any insecure “*zero-hours contract*” work, or when retired be able to draw on their savings in the form of a company, contributory pension – that is, if it hasn't been looted by ruthless asset-strippers. Such is the cut-throat capitalism of today.

But there is an alternative. That alternative – socialism – has actually never been tried. We know that capitalism is forever failing. It fails to solve the simple problems of poverty and homelessness. It cannot solve the problem of war because it is the cause of war in the first place. And it is forever worsening environmental problems. And there is no way the capitalist system can be made to work in the interests of the vast majority – the working class. However, socialism, as yet untried, could solve these problems, and could work for the benefit of all, not, for the profits of the few.

# Book Review: The History Thieves

Ian Cobain's book *THE HISTORY THIEVES: SECRETS, LIES AND THE SHAPING OF A MODERN NATION* (Portobello Books, 2016) is a critical examination of the secrecy that has been applied to British military and security operations over the past seventy years. Through the imposition of the Official Secrets Act and other measures, Cobain shows how the State concealed the existence of Bletchley Park and its successor GCHQ and constructed a secret state which controls, distorts and fabricates the flow of information to the public.

Mr Cobain not only gives examples of unreported wars during the 1960s and 1970s but he also shows that British capitalism has been engaged constantly in wars and conflicts, for over a hundred years, whether the government has been Conservative, Labour or a coalition. History was concealed and manipulated to show British capitalism in a good light.

The title of Cobain's book, *THE HISTORY THIEVES*, derives from government policy at the final days of Empire to deliberately destroy countless colonial papers – a policy known as *Operation Legacy* – in an attempt to erase all traces of the darker deeds of Britain's colonial past.

One of the enduring myths of post-war British foreign policy was that it kept out of the war in Vietnam. However, not many people know that Britain started the conflict on behalf of the French against the Nationalist forces of Viet Minh. In 1945; Britain flew an entire division of troops to the country. The British then went on to re-arm Japanese prisoners of war and compelled them to fight against the Vietnamese under British command. Who was in government at the time? Attlee's Labour Party.

Then there was Greece. The Second World War was not yet over when Britain entered the Civil War in Greece at the end of 1944. According to Cobain:

*“More damage was done to the buildings and infrastructure of Athens during the first three months of British liberation than had been inflicted in more than three years of Nazi occupation”* (p. 68).

Some wars just did not make it to qualify for media interest. In 1961 a British task force was dispatched to newly independent Kuwait to prevent an Iraqi invasion while in October that year British troops engaged with Chinese-backed rebels after the Cameroons had been divided between Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon (p. 7). Raw resources and the protection of strategic spheres of influence were the principal reasons for these invasions.

On entering Downing Street in 1964, Harold Wilson's government inherited the UK's war against Indonesia. When he came to write his memoirs he described it as a war between Malaysia and Indonesia, and omitted to mention Britain's leading role. However, in passing, he did remark that his government had committed 30,000 men, the largest deployment of Britain's armed forces since 1945 (p. 71). What these troops were doing there in such numbers the reader was not told.

Mr Cobain then gives details of the four- year war that the British led in Indonesia in the 1960s and the eleven year Cold War counter-insurgency operation in Oman in the 1960s and 1970s.

He shows that not a year has passed since at least 1914 when Britain has not been fighting *“somewhere or other around the world”* (p. xv). Most of these wars have been kept secret.

Unlike socialism, where the flow of information will be open and transparent, in capitalism information has to be controlled or suppressed by the state, either from internal criticism or from benefitting external nation states.

Of course securing trade routes for oil was often top of the list for dispatching troops to far-off countries. In January



1972 it became known that Britain was fighting a war against rebels in the mountains of Dhofar on behalf of the Sultan of Oman. Cobain gives this account:

*“Situated on the South-West corner of the Arabian Peninsula, the Sultanate of Oman is bordered by the United Arab Emirates to the north and by Saudi Arabia and Yemen to the West and South-West. The country also sits alongside the strait of Hormuz, the thirty-three-mile wide waterway through which oil from the Persian Gulf makes its way to market. In the 1960s, more than sixty-percent of the western world’s crude oil came from the gulf, a giant tanker passing through the Hormuz bottlenecks every ten minutes. As the oil flowed, local economies flourished and became important markets for exported British goods: London became even more anxious to protect its interests in the region and the local rulers who supported them. In 1967 oil was extracted from Oman itself for the first time, and within six years the country was annually producing more than 100 million barrels”.* (p. 74).

British capitalism always tries to portray its foreign policy as a force for moral good. It would. This image is torn to shreds in the fourth chapter of Cobain’s book, which recounts the 1950’s war against the Mau-Mau in Kenya. He cites a book “IMPERIAL RECKONING: THE UNTOLD STORY OF BRITAIN’S GULAG IN KENYA”, by the American historian, Caroline Elkins, published in 2005, which had relied on the verbal testimony of elderly Kenyan survivors who had been imprisoned:

*“...(in) a regime of almost unspeakable barbarity, and a conflict in which the British colonial administrators, police and soldiers...had sunk to a moral depth that would be difficult for many members of the British public to comprehend”* (Cobain, op cit., p.106).

Elkin’s book was predictably trashed in the British press. But later, the government was forced to release 1,500 secret files as part of a trial fought by Kenyans imprisoned, brutalised and tortured during the insurgency that showed that her accounts of “*unspeakable barbarity*” by the British were true.

The papers disclosed in detail the way in which suspected insurgents had been: *Beaten to death, burned alive, raped, castrated...Even children had been killed”*

And in more recent times, in the current Yemeni Civil War in which a coalition force under the leadership of Saudi Arabia intervened on behalf of the former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh against the Houthis, an armed religious – political protest movement:

*“...British military personnel were sitting in the control rooms from which the Saudi Arabian air force was guiding its bombers onto targets across Yemen. The British were helping their Saudi counterparts key in the codes that would help them select and attack their targets. The Saudis were not only flying British-built aircraft and dropping British-made bombs, they were dropping vast numbers of them. Over a three-month period in 2015, the value of exports of British-made bombs and missiles had increased by 11,000 per cent, from £9 million to £1 billion”* (p. 99).

One year later, the GUARDIAN had the following headline: “*One in three Saudi raids on Yemen hit civilian sites*” (17.09.16). According to MSF, a medical NGO, the targets hit included schools and clinics. Remember who are guiding the Saudi Arabian air force and keying in the codes to select and attack targets.

What of the British politicians? What do they say? We are given two gems by two former Prime Ministers; one by David Cameron and another by Gordon Brown. Standing between two union jack flags and speaking of the Iraq war, Cameron remarked, with a straight face, that the British were “*a peaceful people*” (p. 98). While, on a visit to East Africa, two years after Caroline Elkins had published her book on the savage barbarism of the British administration in colonial Kenya, Gordon Brown commented:

*“The days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over. We should move forward; we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it. We should talk...about British values that are enduring: tolerance, liberty, civic duty, that are in Britain and influenced the rest of the world”* (p. 107).

It was of course sheer fiction. British capitalism has been continuously engaged in war and conflict for over a century: hardly “*peaceful*”. As for the British Empire and its values; it was constructed on piracy, looting, theft,

slavery and the slave trade, violence and war, all sanctified by religion and the missionaries. British capitalism's values are ones of trade and profit with no tolerance shown for those who stand in the way.

Workers, in Britain, had to struggle for the right to vote, for the establishment of trade unions and for the space to pursue a socialist politics against the aggressive interests of the ruling class and their political agents. What British capitalism gave to the world was one decade of war, death and destruction after the other; a world drowned in blood. There is nothing to celebrate as Ian Cobain's book so clearly demonstrates.

## READING CAPITAL

Next year is the 150th anniversary of the publication of Marx's CAPITAL. Not only will we be publishing a series of articles (some already on our web site) and holding a Summer School on *Capital in the 21st Century* but we are also placing on our web site two lectures on the first four chapters of CAPITAL given by Hardy in 1970. The two lectures can be also be bought as a double DVD for £5 plus postage and packaging by contacting the publication committee. Due to the techniques of modern recording the CDs have a greater clarity than the original cassette.

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# Libya, War and Oil

In August this year the US government extended its war in the Middle East and Africa to Libya. It had previously attacked an Isis training camp there some months back killing 50 people. The British government already has military '*advisors*' in the country. The Obama administration sent fighter jets into Libya in an attempt to disrupt and ultimately remove the terrorist group Isis from Sirte and the Sirte Basin with its oil reserves. The attack also signalled to Russia and China that the United States intent to pursue an aggressive foreign policy in the region.

The last time capitalist countries in the West were in Libya was back in 2011 when, in an eight month operation, NATO removed Colonel Gadhafi's regime from power. Coincidentally Gadhafi was just about to offer an oil deal with Russia, India and China (NATIONAL BUSINESS NEWS, 15th March 2011).

Then, as now, the reason for military involvement is strategic; primarily to protect and maintain the supply of gas and oil to the coast, and then on to mainland Europe and the US. Also Libya has five principal ports leading onto the Mediterranean and these are not only useful for the transport of oil and gas.

The campaign of 2011 to secure Libya for Western interests did not go very well. It may have removed the Gadhafi regime but over the last five years it has created conditions of political instability in which thousands have been injured or killed and oil production disrupted. Civil war between competing political factions is the consequence of Western intervention in Libya. The anarchy and chaos also enabled Isis to set up a presence in the oil-rich Sirte region.

What of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) which is supported by the US and its NATO allies? According to US government officials the GNA "*invited*" the US into their country to attack Isis positions. This "*invitation*" was nothing of the sort but an example of realpolitik. The US needs official sanction and legitimacy to carry out its military operations. However, the GNA is a political creature of US policy and was politically forced on Libya earlier this year. The Prime Minister designate Fayeze al-Sarraj heads a government to do the bidding of the US and its allies. How much control Sarraj's government really has in Libya, even in the capital Tripoli, is a moot point? The east of Libya is controlled by forces under the leadership of General Khalifa Haftar who is opposed to the GNA. After Isis is removed will the US jets be turned on Haftar and his army? Libya will then still be wracked by civil war, death and destruction.

And there is a possibility that General Haftar will receive military support from President Putin's Russia who looks to the Libyan ports for housing Russian warships and other military assets in the Mediterranean area. Haftar has already been to Moscow and met Russian officials at the Kremlin. Russia is likely to become Libya's major military

equipment provider because under a 2008 deal Moscow cancelled Tripoli's \$4.5 billion debt in exchange for contracts for Russian defense companies that the Libyan government is yet to deliver on due to a UN arms embargo (AL MONITOR 31st May 2014).

In 2008 Moscow and Tripoli were about to set up a Russian naval base in Benghazi, but the ensuing uprising against Gadhafi and the subsequent intervention by NATO meant the plans did not materialise. However, Russia wants to have a strong naval presence in the Mediterranean. A flotilla of warships from the Northern, Baltic and Black Sea fleets conducts regular exercises in the Mediterranean, attempting to reach the same capacity as the Soviet 5th Naval Squadron permanently based in the region once had.

## **It is all about oil and strategic spheres of influence**

As with its other interventions in the Middle East and Africa, the US is concerned about potential oil supplies and other strategic factors such as the use of friendly ports, preventing Russia and China dominating the region and unimpeded sea routes. Isis is currently embedded in a region rich in oil and gas reserves.

There is already an agreement between the GNA and Petroleum Facilities Guard, a paramilitary force who is charged with the protection of the oil infrastructures of the country, to reopen three eastern ports to ship out oil and gas. A client state in Libya is a very important prize for the US. Particularly when Libya happens to have one of the largest oil reserves in Africa.

Sarir, one of the largest oil fields in Syria, used to produce some 180,000 barrels of oil a day and is connected to an oil pipeline that terminates in the oil port of Hariga. Before the Civil War and with Isis taking control of Sarir, Libya accounted for 10% of oil imports to Europe's Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development member countries. Libya even sent 43,000 barrels a day to the US in 2013.

At 48 billion barrels, Libya has the 9th-largest proven oil reserves in the world and one of the largest reserves in Africa —38% of the continent's total, according to the US Department of Energy. Oil accounted for 98% of Libya's government revenue in 2012,

<http://uk.businessinsider.com/libya-has-48-billion-barrels-of-oil-but-its-industry-has-almost-entirely-collapse>

## **The Socialist opposition to war**

The problem of sourcing energy for capitalist production is an issue socialists have no interest in. Socialists have no interests in the problems affecting the capitalist class and its politicians. Neither should workers. The class interest of workers and capitalists is diametrically opposed to one another.

As a class workers do not own the means of production and distribution. We do not have raw resources to protect, or strategic ports to maintain, or trade routes to guard. All workers own is their labour power or ability to work which they are forced to sell to employers in exchange for a wage or salary. Workers, as Marx noted, have no country.

Nor do socialists take sides in capitalism's wars. Unlike the disreputable *Stop the War* campaign group and its Trotskyist backers from the SWP and Counterfire, socialists do not point the finger of blame at this or that particular capitalist country. The capitalist Left always see the United States and its allies as the villain of the piece - not Russia, nor China, nor Isis.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has a consistent and principled track record of opposing capitalism's wars on the grounds of class, class interest and class struggle. We oppose capitalism wherever it exists, not supporting one country and opposing another. Nor do we support nationalist groups struggling to replace one ruling class with another. The workers are involved in a *class* struggle: they should not let themselves be drawn into a national struggle between countries.

War cannot solve working class problems. War cuts across the fundamental class interest of the working class and

forces them to support different sections of the capitalist class. In our pamphlet: THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND WAR, we wrote:

*Wars reflect the determination of governments to defend or to gain control of valuable possessions by armed might when other means have failed. The purpose of war is to gain or maintain the mastery of territories where there are rich mineral deposits, vital land, sea or air routes or areas where goods can be sold or capital invested (p. 8).*

The above statement was written 66 years ago but it could easily have been written today. It is one of the special contributions of the SPGB to Socialist thought to have recognised that Socialism “*spreads through the workers acquiring socialist knowledge; the waging of war can have no part in that necessary process*” (ibid p. 93).

## The Housing Crisis

The housing crisis is not new and has affected one generation of workers after another since the working class were first herded into cities in the early 19th century. Workers have always had to struggle to pay the rent and mortgage. There has always been poor housing, slums and homes built that do not meet the needs of individuals and families.

Decent homes which meet the needs of people from when they are young to when they are elderly will not be built under capitalism. Only the rich in capitalism will get the best housing in the best locations. The working class will always get second best. If decent housing does not exist for the working class then the statistics showing capitalism’s failure to provide good housing for everyone exists in abundance.

According to Shelter, on average house prices are now almost seven times workers’ incomes. Many workers are finding it a struggle to pay the mortgage. Children have to live longer with their parents. One third of the homes in the rented sector fail to meet the government’s Decent Homes Standard. And more than 2000 people do not have roofs over their head. Reforming capitalism is not the solution to the housing crisis. The housing Crisis, as Engels said over 150 years ago, is just one problem of many affecting the working class.

Things have to change. And the change has to be political and revolutionary. The urgent abolition of capitalism and its replacement with socialism by the working class is the only way to end the crisis. Decent housing in sufficient numbers can only be constructed within the framework of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by everyone. Production directly to meet social needs will mean decent housing that reflects the way in which people in socialism will want to lead their lives.

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# From Zero Hour Contracts to no Labour Contracts

The number of UK workers on zero-hour contracts has risen 20% in a year to more than 900,000 (GUARDIAN, 9th September 2016). Insecure employment has now become a fact of life for the working class. Most zero-hours contracts are found in the retail industry, restaurants, leisure companies and hotels where wages are generally low anyway and it is difficult for workers to form themselves into effective trade unions.

Marx commented that capitalism prefers piecework: naturally, as this system makes workers sweat harder, and it's easier for the shop-floor managers to re-set daily the tasks of each worker to prevent them building up sufficient speed, so their weekly pay never rose to the level they hoped for.

But 'zero hours' is the best system of all. That was the system used in the London and other dockyards in the 19th century where the workforce was casual, and dependent on favours from the foremen - most workers who turned up seeking work did not get work. That system lasted until the post-war Labour government got rid of it because of the shortage of labour and industrial action tipped the balance temporarily in favour of the dockers.

Decades later, containerisation was brought in with an Australian management system which effectively de-

unionised the work-force. London's dockland became valuable real estate, a playground for the rich, and the same process has been followed on other major ports, such as Bristol and Liverpool, and in other countries.

Zero-hours contracts for the casual labour-force is back with a vengeance: for example, hairdressers for some decades have had a system where a girl will rent a place in a salon and the employers will phone her if she's needed (she's on call but unpaid unless they get her in). And the couriers and mini-cab trade - including especially Uber - also have large numbers of workers available, unpaid unless and until a job comes up.

The market research and opinion polls companies have always operated this way. To make a living their workers could be on the books of maybe 9-10 companies, with more or less regular jobs from 3-4 firms, while others were only occasionally active. If a worker had an accident, sprained ankle, broken wrist and so on - this meant possible disaster financially.

The building industry also uses a semi-casual workforce - as they did when Robert Tressell wrote of "*The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*", 100 years ago. This writer remembers in the mid-1970s waiting outside a public house in London with other labourers waiting for vans to pull up and take men to building sites around London. There were always more labourers than space on the vans. Building labourers from Kosovo, Romania and the Baltic countries have now replaced Irish labourers waiting at dawn on street corners for the appearance of the white van and potential work.

Agriculture too relies nowadays on the most vulnerable workers of all - "*illegal*" migrants, hired through unscrupulous gang-masters.

Add to these, the new industry of privately run '*care homes*' and provision of carers for the disabled, sick and elderly, also relies on a casual and low paid labour force, paid on hourly rates but again on the '*zero-hours*' basis, their incomes being as precarious as that of any other '*casual*' labourer.

What do all these '*industries*' have in common? Almost all have no trade unions. If the workers try to get Trade Union representation, many of these firms operate a blacklist - and use this as a way to enforce discipline over hours and wages. However, trade unions can only do so much. The playing field they have to economically work on is always tilted in favour of the employers who have the added advantage of owning it.

A zero-hours contract is defined by the Office for National Statistics as a contract that does not offer guaranteed hours of work. TUC studies have shown that an average worker earns 50% more than those on zero-hour contracts.

Zero-hours contracts also by-pass minimum wage legislation. John Philpot, director of the Jobs Economist consultancy said:

*People employed on zero-hours contracts are only entitled to the minimum wage for the hours they actually work and receive nothing when 'on call'.*

Employers and their politicians egregiously defend these contracts claiming that they give flexibility to some workers but as Frances O'Grady, Secretary General of the TUC pointed out:

*It is very easy for politicians and employers to talk about the flexibility these contracts offer. But they are not the ones living at the sharp end of the labour market. If you don't know how much work you will have from one day to the next, paying the bills and arranging things like childcare can be a nightmare.*

And the union Unite stated:

*Employers use zero-hours contracts to cut wages, avoid holiday pay, pensions, and other benefits enjoyed by employees and agency staff. Workers are also unable to take on other work, as they are obliged to be available for work at the whim of the employer. And with the high level of insecurity comes the risk of bullying, harassment and stress.*

<http://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigning/saynotozerohourscontracts/>



Zero-Hours contracts first became popular again in the late 1980s and 1990s as a way of improving labour market flexibility and reducing business costs for employers. However, there were many reports of workers being asked to remain physically present on the premises, available to work if their services were required – in work, but unpaid unless a job came available.

The last Labour government outlawed this form of abuse as part of the National Minimum Wage Act in 1998 but still allowed the practice of zero-hours contracts to continue.

Tony Blair, at the Labour Party's 1995 Brighton Conference pledged that Labour would end the practice of zero-hours contracts. But it never happened because when in government it was Labour who were in favour of '*flexible*' labour markets which reflected employers' interests. 80 or so Labour MPs have used zero-hours contracts for the purpose of employing workers, as have many Labour Councils and '*progressive*' papers like THE GUARDIAN.

A CHANNEL 4 documentary, broadcast on 1 August 2013, employed secret cameras in Amazon UK's Rugeley warehouse to document worker abuses. It concluded that Amazon used "*controversial*" zero-hour contracts as a tool to reprimand staff, and were "*tagging*" employees with GPS and subjecting them to harsh working conditions.

The problem with the TUC and unions like Unite is that they take labour contracts as a given. Unions see nothing wrong with labour contracts between workers and employers as long as they are "*fair and equitable*". But how can there be '*fairness*' or '*equitability*' in the relationship between capital and wage-labour? Where there is wage and salary slavery, it does not matter whether it is the loose zero-hours contract or the more sophisticated ones found in full-employment.

What needs to be challenged is the existence of a labour market, the buying and selling of a workers' labour power and the ability of employers to buy labour power because, as a class of capitalists, they have monopoly ownership over the means of production and distribution.

Workers never agreed entering into contracts. Historically workers were forced into the labour market or starve. There is nothing natural about having to work for a wage and salary. It is a social practice associated with capitalism.

As mostly defensive organisations trade unions have to struggle daily against the encroachment of capital and the intensity and extent of class exploitation. They have no choice while capitalism exists. Yet "*exploitation*" being associated with zero-hours is, in fact, is a misuse of the word. All workers are exploited whether they are on zero-hours contracts or not. Workers sell their ability to work to capitalists at its value. They are put to work to produce commodities which are the property of the capitalist.

The value of labour power is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour embodied in what workers and their families need for subsistence. Say it is five hours of labour time of a contracted seven hours a day. The workers still has to work a further two hours for free; that is surplus unpaid labour or surplus value. And this is the source of the capitalists' profits. This is how exploitation takes place under capitalism.

While workers are degraded and humiliated in taking zero-hours contracts, forced into the loneliness and precarious living of self-employment, or working hours for 'free' as unpaid over-time on the train or when getting home from work as many in the City do, they all belong to the same class and are all exploited in the Marxian sense of the word.

One thing socialists can say is that in a socialist society, without the buying and selling of labour-power, people will be able to bring up their children, meet with friends, and act socially without their time being imprisoned within labour markets. Stress and bullying will not be associated with work. Work in socialism will be enjoyable, something to be looked forward to rather than something repellent and unpleasant.

Under capitalism, human time is controlled time. In socialism work will be just something we do because we will want to do it, not because we have to. Work will be as enjoyable as reading a book to your grandchildren, walking alongside a river bank or singing in a choir. And work will be a co-cooperative and social activity. Let the machines and robots do the drudgery, human existence should be creative; something to be enjoyed.



Instead of wanting to get rid of zero-hours contracts workers should be consciously, democratically and politically organising as socialists to get rid of labour contracts along with labour markets and the wages system. That means abolishing capitalism and establishing socialism.

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# Socialism, Politics and Sectarianism

Does calling a socialist or a socialist party “*Sectarian*” have any political justification or is it just a form of abuse? The Socialist Party of Great Britain has long been written off by its opponents as “*sectarian*” as though making this accusation against us places our opponents on some sort of political high ground.

What annoys opponents of the SPGB is the hostility clause of the DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES published in 1904, long before the proliferation of parties describing themselves as “*socialist*” or “*communist*”. The hostility clause calls into question those political parties who call themselves “socialist” but have instead pursued social reform programmes, advocated direct action or had nationalisation and state capitalism as their goals.

The seventh clause unequivocally states:

*That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.*

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has never collaborated with anti-socialist political parties nor has the Party entertained taking part in shared political platforms and forums. When members of the SPGB attended, for example, the Govan Forum in 1931, it was in opposition to all the other groups and organisations taking part (<http://www.socialiststudies.org.uk/polemic%20govan.shtml>).

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has consistently reiterated that the host of political parties claiming to be “*Marxist*” or “*socialist*” do not serve the interest of the working class and must therefore be opposed. The struggle to establish socialism is not compatible with trying to administer capitalism, improve it with reforms or replace private capitalism with state capitalism.

In his satirical but deeply cynical pamphlet AS SOON AS THIS PUB CLOSES, John Sullivan said of the SPGB’s hostility clause: “*Religious sects achieve the same effect by shaving their heads or wearing distinctive clothes*” <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/critiques/sullivan/pub-index.html>

Mr Sullivan’s corrosive cynicism should be treated with the contempt it deserves. In John Le Carre’s, novel, TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY, the central character, George Smiley says that his opponent has a fundamental weakness: as a fanatic he is always carrying a secret doubt.

Similarly the corrosive cynicism of someone like John Sullivan hides a political secret deep beneath a sea of political negativity; a conservative desire to keep everything as it is. Scratch a cynic like Sullivan and the wound bleeds a deep blue conservatism.

Cynicism apart, why should a political party with a socialist objective and a socialist political programme want to unite, collaborate or compromise with other political parties who reject the means to establish socialism and the socialist object itself? The answer from our opponents is a deafening silence.

## Marx, The first International and Sects

In his paper THE JOY OF SECTS, Al Richardson quoted several letters written by Marx which apparently distinguishes “sects” from the working class movement.

<http://www.whatnextjournal.org.uk/Pages/Back/Wnext9/Sects.html>

Marx gave three considered comments on sectarianism in letters he wrote regarding the problems associated with the First International. In the first letter, written in 1868 Marx stated:

*...the sect seeks its raison d'être and point of honour not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from the class movement.*

( Letter to Schweitzer, 13 October 1868, The First International and After, Penguin, 1974, p.155).

In the second letter, published in 1871 he said:

*The International was founded in order to replace the Socialist or semi-Socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle. The original Rules and the Inaugural Address show this at a glance. On the other hand, the International could not have asserted itself if the course of history had not already smashed sectarianism. The development of Socialist sectarianism and that of the real labour movement always stand in indirect proportion to each other. So long as the sects are justified (historically), the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historical movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity all sects are essentially reactionary. For all that, what history exhibits everywhere was repeated in the history of the International. What is antiquated tries to reconstitute and assert itself within the newly acquired form.*

(Letter to Bolte, 23 November 1871, Marx and Engels, Collected Works, Vol.44, p.252).

And in the third letter, published in 1872 he said:

*The first phase in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is marked by sectarianism. This is because the proletariat has not yet reached the stage of being sufficiently developed to act as a class. Individual thinkers provide a critique of social antagonisms, and put forward fantastic solutions which the mass of workers can only accept, pass on, and put into practice. By their very nature, the sects established by these initiators are abstentionist, strangers to all genuine action, to politics, to strikes, to coalitions, in brief, to any unified movement. The mass of the proletariat always remains unmoved by, if not hostile to, their propaganda.... All these sects, though at first they provide an impetus to the movement, become an obstacle to it once it has moved further forward; they then become reactionary.*

(Marx & Engels, "The Alleged Splits in the International", March 1872, The First International and After, pp.298-9).

These three letters (the last, a circular adopted by the General Council of the International), showed that Marx did not use sectarianism as a term of abuse but related sects to what he called the “*class movement*” or the “*real labour movement*”.

In the first letter Marx writes of a “*class movement*”. For Marx this “*class movement*” was the First International. He states:

*The International is a genuine and militant organization of the proletarian class of all countries, united in their common struggle against the capitalists and the landowners, against their class power organized in the state.*

Yet for any practical and political purpose surely this class movement must have a socialist objective or it is nothing? True, workers are forced into an economic struggle for better wages and working conditions, but the class struggle is also a political struggle towards the establishment of socialism.

So at what stage do workers reach full political development as a class? For socialists, it is when they have formed themselves into an active socialist majority within capitalism. Marx called it acting as a “*class for itself*”.

Of course, all socialist movements have to start somewhere and they will remain small and ineffectual while the working class support capitalism by voting for capitalist political parties, following leaders and supporting wars.

Nevertheless the size of the socialist party, although necessary for organisation and political engagement will always remain small while millions of workers still support capitalist politicians. What is vital, though, is that the membership is made-up of socialists, that there are no leaders and that there is agreement that the sole purpose of the party is to establish socialism by propagating socialist ideas in order to “*make socialists*” (William Morris).

In the second letter Marx states that the class movement is more important than the utopian sects were replaced by and incompatible with the class movement.

Historically he recognised the role of Utopian sects, but argued these were now superseded by the class movement.

Yet the problem of the International was its composition of people with differing political positions. The International collapsed because of the tensions within the organisation between anarchists, revolutionists and social reformists. Collaboration between groups with different means and different objectives do not last long.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain made a considered assessment of the First International and this is worth repeating:

*According to the first rule that was adopted the association aimed at “the protection, advancement and complete emancipation of the working classes”. Here was the thin edge of reform. The rules gave the Central Council considerable power and this was the cause of friction later on; ...It is significant to notice that nowhere in the Address, the Preamble or the Rules is there any reference to the common ownership of the means of production although there are constant references to the emancipation of labour. From the Communist Manifesto to the International Working Men’s Association was a long step in years, but it was partly a step backward; an attempt to get a large body together without placing a great deal of stress upon clarity of outlook. It was an attempt to unite workers on a programme that was broad enough to include those with a variety of fundamentally conflicting views in the hope that the discussions and the struggles of the organisation would eventually lead to the shedding of ideas that were anti-working class and thus clear the outlook of the worker.*

(The Communist Manifesto and the Last One Hundred Years, Socialist Party of Great Britain 1948 p. 14 and 15).

In the third letter (written jointly with Engels and later published as a circular within the General Council of the International), Marx criticised those political organisations who abstained from “*politics, strikes, coalitions...*”

The first two points raised by Marx do not apply to the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The SPGB does take conscious political action as a political party. The SPGB also acknowledges that within the capitalist system the trade union movement offers workers the only option to improve their wages and conditions through strikes and the collective withdrawal of their labour. However, socialists understand that any improvements gained will be precarious and temporary dependent on the cyclical movement of capital and will have no effect whatsoever with furthering political change and a socialist revolution. Trade unions seek to reform capitalism, not replace it with socialism.

However Marx’s third point with respect to “*coalitions*” would have meant him writing off the SPGB as a sect because of our hostility towards political parties who do not share the same political programme and socialist objective.

In 1872 Marx could not see the harm coalitions and collaborations would create for the working class. A political coalition between socialists and non-socialists kills off the development of socialist consciousness. Look at the JOINT MANIFESTO OF ENGLISH SOCIALISTS published in 1893. Here is an example of a coalition between the Fabian Society, the Hammersmith Socialist Society and the Social Democratic Federation claiming that they all agreed on the need to abolish the wages system.

*Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control, the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines and the land. Thus we look to put an end forever to the wage-system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis* (p.3).

<http://digital.lib.umd.edu/image?pid=umd:106585>

What happened?

Before the ink was dry, the rump of the group not only backtracked on the common aim of abolishing the wages system but pursued a list of “*palliatives*” and went on to form the Labour Party. So the JOINT MANIFESTO did not further the aim of socialism and the socialist revolution but, instead, most of the signatories went on to help establish a Liberal-backed trade union pressure group, the Labour Party, which later became indistinguishable from the Liberal and Tory Parties in its support for the interests of British capitalism; including the mass slaughter of the working class in two World Wars and the numerous and continuing smaller ones. The Labour Party from the start relied on electoral pacts with the Liberal Party, and was happy to support the World War One Liberal government.

For a socialist party to form a coalition or collaborate with non-socialist parties just creates confusion and makes it harder for workers to understand the case for socialism. A worker has to make the choice of either voting for capitalism or working to establish socialism and to reject the former and support the latter. For a worker to make this decision requires the utmost clarity, not the confusion that would inevitably follow from collaborating with those who profess to support socialism but whose actions act as a barrier to the establishment of socialism. On this point Marx was wrong.

If the Socialist Party of Great Britain was to fold – and there is no right to political existence – then a similar political party would still be required to establish socialism. In other words, if the Socialist party did not exist then it would have to be invented.

However we have survived a cruel 20th century of war, social reformism and totalitarian governments describing themselves as “*Marxist*”, “*Socialist*” and “*Communist*”. We have in fact kept alive key Marxian ideas advocating and explaining the practical proposition of what socialism will be like and the political means necessary to establish socialism.

The tenacious fight to argue our case based on the OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES has ensured our survival for 25 years following our expulsion from the Clapham based socialist party.

Marx was wrong. A socialist party cannot collaborate with non-socialist parties nor have non-socialists as members. That is not sectarian but political common sense.

Sectarianism if it means anything at all when applied to working class politics grows out of the misguided belief that socialists are a privileged, distinct and separate group apart from the working class. That leads to the fallacious belief that socialist theory has to be injected into the working class movement from without because workers are not competent enough politically to think for themselves.

This political elitism has never been the position of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES of the SPGB came out of the political class struggle and was not imposed as a “*general principle*” on the class struggle from outside. The SPGB stands and falls on its own OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES. While we acknowledge the vital contribution made by Marx and Engels to the socialist movement we do not agree with all they said particularly on the question of the relationship between socialists and those who claim to be socialists.

Capitalism

*Capitalism has not existed for all time but is the outcome of a process of social evolution. Starting with primitive communism in which property was held in common, followed in turn by the kind of society known in Greece and Rome, based on production by chattel slave labour, and by Feudal society out of which capitalism grew. In each of the societies after primitive communism there has been exploitation of one class by another but the form of exploitation has changed. The feudal serf was not “owned” as the chattel slave had been, but he was tied to the land of the manorial lord and under obligation to give unpaid labour on the lord’s land while free to maintain himself by his labour on land under his control.*

*All past social revolutions, up to and including that which made capitalism the prevailing social system, created a new exploiting class: now the capitalist class exploit the workers. It is true that alongside these two main classes there are other groups, such as peasants and the 'self-employed', leading an often precarious existence. Once the means of production and distribution have come to be owned in common by society there cannot be any subject class to be exploited. Hence, in the words of Clause 4 of the Declaration of Principles, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind "without distinction of race or sex".*

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# What Is The Difference Between The Working Class Movement and The Socialist Movement?

In THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO Marx and Engels gave a historical sketch of the development of the working class movement. Historically, they traced out the working class from the beginning as an incoherent mass with no organisational capacity to a mature position of being able to establish by their own effort a revolutionary socialist political party.

The working class came into existence as a class after being driven off the land and forced into the new cities looking for employment and then struggling against the capitalist class over the extent and intensity of exploitation. As Marx and Engels noted: *"With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie"* (p. 67)

For Marx and Engels the working class passes through various stages of development:

- \* The class struggle is first carried on by individual labourers
- \* Then the struggle takes place by workers in a factory
- \* Then by operatives in one trade
- \* Then against machines rather than the owners of capital
- \* Then the working class is used by the *bourgeoisie* for its own political ends. Two examples being the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) where workers were courted by employers to support their interests against the landed aristocracy.
- \* Then the formation by workers into trade unions despite the Combination Acts
- \* Periodically there are riots and set backs
- \* Consequently the working class developed a high level of class consciousness to organise itself into a political party *"but is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves"*. (THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO loc cit pp 66-67)

This is the historical development of the working class movement informed by and acting upon the class struggle around concrete and material interests. In terms of time-span we are talking about just several centuries which is nothing when the time-span of human beings is considered.

Marx also made the comment that at the decisive hour of the class struggle:

*Just as, ... at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.* (loc cit p70).

Given the fact that by 1904, some 56 years after the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO was written, a group of workers produced the OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES demonstrated that *"bourgeois ideologists"*, might well be welcomed into the socialist party on equal terms but they did not hold the monopoly *"of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole"*. Workers had demonstrated that they could think and act politically in their own class interests.



Is there a difference between the working class movement and the socialist movement? One of the first attempts to answer this question was made in 1895 by Eleanor Marx in a little known article “*The Working Class Movement in England*”.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/eleanor-marx/1895/working-class-england/ch01.htm>

Three points can be made about the article.

First, Eleanor Marx follows the brief sketch set out in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO of the development of the working class from an incoherent mass to an organised class. She also fleshed out this development by giving concrete examples like the first General strike of 1842 and such groups as the Luddites and the Chartists.

Second, she drew a distinction between the working class movement and the socialist movement seeing the former as developing class consciousness to become a socialist movement; this is what Marx and Engels had in mind when they ended their sketch of the development of the working class movement with the formation by workers of a political party. Once a political party is formed the working class movement becomes a socialist movement.

And, third, she believed a socialist movement was represented by the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party:

*So far no reference has been made to any purely Socialist movement during recent years. And it must be at once admitted that the Socialist movement, as such, lags sadly behind the Continental movement. The Social-Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party are, however, doing valuable work. The smallness of their successes at recent elections is no criterion of their own strength, and above all it is no criterion of the strength of the Socialist movement.*

In the *Manifesto* of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, published in 1905, the SPGB repudiated Eleanor Marx’s claims that the SDF and ILP were doing “*useful work*” on behalf of the working class.

*In this country there are many organisations claiming to fulfil the requirements of a workers’ party, There is, for instance, the Social-Democratic Federation, established over twenty years by Middle-class men. In most cases these men never had a real grip of the working class position (p 5).*

*The I.L.P. is in reality run by a set of job-hunters, whose only apparent political principle is to catch votes on varying pretexts and by still more varying means. They openly repudiate the class struggle; the basis of socialism....The independent Labour Party is obviously not a party of the workers (p. 7).*

How would we describe the working class movement today some 168 years after the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO was published? A tragedy springs to mind. Consider what workers achieved between 1800 and 1904 to what they have achieved between 1904 and 2016, and to all intents and purpose the working class has remained as Marx put it a “*class in itself*” rather than a class “*for itself*”. Most workers vote for leaders and parties who have no other interest than to administer capitalism.

As for the socialist movement, it moves at a trickle beset by obstacles - the Labour Party and reformism, nationalism, religion, Leninism, war and so on. But socialists still carry on propagating socialist ideas and the urgent need for the establishment of socialism by a revolutionary working class. We have no choice.

*“Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeois to-day, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class” (The COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (p. 70).*

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## Death and Destruction in Aleppo



Throughout August of this year Channel 4 News transmitted images of death and destruction of rebel held areas of Aleppo in Syria by Russian and Syrian jets largely against hospitals and civilian targets. The images were visceral as bodies were pulled out of the rubble and bloodstained children taken to hospitals where doctors tried to save their lives under primitive medical conditions.

The UN special envoy for Syria has estimated that 400,000 people have been killed throughout the past five years of civil war. Russia, according to one source, has killed more civilians than Isis (TIMES 21st August 2016). Millions of people have been displaced with Syrian refugees located in adjoining countries and throughout Europe where conditions are either often squalid or unremittingly hard and bleak.

As tragic and distressing the images are from Aleppo, the death and destruction is caused by the intense rivalries within the international capitalist system and between the different factions fighting in the Syrian Civil War.

War under capitalism takes place because of the necessity for nation states to plunder or protect raw resources like oil and gas, to defend trade routes or to prevent other countries from using them and to secure strategic positions like ports and airfields for military assets and personnel. Within countries one ruling class sometimes fights another for more parochial interests contained within the contours of the nation state.

It is noticeable how left wing organisations like the Stop the War Coalition, led by seasoned Trotskyists, are relatively quiet when it comes to Russian and Iranian adventurism in Syria yet take every opportunity to become outraged at US, NATO or British military attacks in Syria against Isis.

To censure US or Western Imperialism is politically more important for the capitalist Left than criticisms of the military actions of Russia and Iran since it fits in with their narrow-minded Trotskyist world-view. Very little is said, too, of the terrorist Islamist group, Hezbollah, also fighting in Syria on behalf of Assad's regime. The barbarism and cruelty of Russian military involvement in Syria's civil war should be recorded.

The death and destruction is nothing less than state terrorism. The aim is to demoralise and subjugates the civilian population in Aleppo by fear. If it had been US jets that had been indiscriminately killing the elderly, women and children then there would have been marches and meetings held by the capitalist left to denounce "*US Imperialism*".

What about any criticism from the *Stop the War Coalition* of Russian imperialism and expansionism under Putin in the Mediterranean of equal severity to their criticism of the US?

Iran shares with Russia a common interest in maintaining the Assad regime in Syria since it is a strategic ally for both countries. Syria provides Iran access to the Mediterranean while, for Russia, Syria is the only country on the Medeterranian that provides a port for a Russian naval base and several air bases. The issue for Russian and Iranian intervention in Syria then is strategic, one of the principal reasons for war in capitalism.

The alliance between Russia and Syria dates back to the 1940's and gives Russia access to important Middle East bases. Syria has been of strategic importance to Russia (then the Soviet Union) since 1971 when they leased a naval base at Tartus, on Syria's Mediterranean coast. Tartus holds the Russian fleet of ten warships and other naval vessels in the area. The strategic importance of the Russian fleet at Tartus is largely the distance between Russia, the Mediterranean and Russia's military and economic interests in the region. Tartus is also close to Suez an, three Gulf States friendly to Western Capitalism and of course near Israel.

Russia also has a lucrative arms deal with Syria and accounts for over three quarters of Syria's arm purchases, including in August 2015, fighter jets and other weapons. Similarly the US (and British and French) arm sales to Saudi Arabia have resulted in the various Middle eastern conflicts, including that in the Yemen, becoming a proxy for a resurgent Cold War, with ever louder sabre-rattling on both sides.

And the use of Iran's airfield to facilitate more intense military attacks in Eastern Syria is also explained by Russia's strategic interests. An article in UPI (August 16th 2016) stated:

*The appearance of Russian pilots at Iran's Hamadan airbase is no accident and is not related only to the liberation*

*of Aleppo. It was preceded by an entire chain of events bearing witness to the formation of a completely new context in the eastern part of the Middle East. This concerns the meeting of the "Caspian Troika" in Baku on Aug. 8, which set a new level of economic cooperation between Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as the Aug. 9 visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to St. Petersburg, which significantly reduced the tensions in bilateral relations between Moscow and Ankara, and the rapid launch of Russian-Iranian economic interactivity, primarily in the fields of transportation and energy.*

Socialists take no sides in capitalism's wars. The socialist case against war is part and parcel of our case against capitalism. Socialists are opposed to war not just because of the killing and destruction, the waste of resources all that goes with war. The real interests at stake in the Syrian conflict, as with all capitalism's wars, are not the workers' interests. We urge workers to look at the real causes of war: conflicts over raw resources, trade routes, market and spheres of strategic importance.

When governments blame other governments it is always a false propaganda. Governments do not give out the reasons why they spend billions on fighting wars because they know that if they told the working class the truth about war within capitalism they would not give their support.

Socialists also oppose wars because with war comes nationalist propaganda, which is used: *"to confuse the minds of the workers and turn their attention from the class struggle"* (SPGB Statement, August 1914).

What is needed for the working class to prevent wars happening is for workers to understand why wars happen – that they are caused by commercial rivalry between competing sections of the capitalist class. And understanding the facts about capitalism, workers should then organise democratically to gain political power in order to end the class system and establish socialism.

## CAPITALISM FAILS THE WORKING CLASS

If you think that Labour has failed the working class, you are not alone in thinking this way. Yet we are told there is no alternative to capitalism; to the profit system. And with this it's never ending problems – the struggle by workers for reasonable wages and tolerable working conditions, the struggle against insecurity and poverty, the curse of wars and terrorism. But do you really believe there is an alternative to capitalism, only an occasional, limited, choice between alternating and very similar ruling parties?

The Socialist Party of Great Britain asks you to think for yourself, to reject political leaders who claim to act in your interests. The mainstream political parties, whose policies are practically identical, only offer you the usual Tweedledee and Tweedledum choice. This is no choice at all. They are parties which invariably fail the working class – for the simple reason that the function of governments is to defend the interests of the capitalist class.

Political leaders –whatever their parties – cannot solve the basic problems workers experience. The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn is no different.

The problems of poverty, unemployment and war can only be resolved by establishing a new social system based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Production for use not for profit – that is socialism.

Capitalism means endless international economic competition. So long as the world is organised on a capitalist economic basis, economic rivalries will continue to produce wars and terrorism.

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# Obituaries: Doreen Davies and Olive D'Arcy

## Doreen Davies

Doreen Davies was a life-long socialist for whom socialism politically defined her activity in adult life as well as her world out-look. Doreen and her late husband, Merion, were life-long members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. They both joined the SPGB in 1949 shortly after end of the Second World War. And both remained committed socialists throughout their adult lives.

Doreen and Merion were members of Paddington Branch of the SPGB where Doreen was also treasurer. Later she was to perform the same duties at North West London Branch.

Doreen attended Party lectures and gave a few lectures on socialism herself. She was often in the chair at the Party Conference held each Easter. She was a fearless but strict chairperson who ensured order like an old-fashioned teacher. Doreen did not suffer fools lightly.

Doreen was also a long-time member of the Executive Committee of the SPGB which met Tuesday evenings, time she gave willingly even though it put pressure on her family life. She gave a great deal of time and effort to the Party in-between her other activities.

Doreen's socialism was sound and principled. She wanted to see the establishment of a society of common ownership and democratic control of the means of living; a society without poverty, war, human suffering and inequality.

In June 1991 she joined with other socialists to set-up the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain following the expulsion of Northwest London and Camden Branches for using the full name of the Party in propaganda as required by Clause 8 of the Object and Declaration of Principles.

After Merion's death and her health began to fail, Doreen could only attend the odd branch meeting and lecture in London. Nevertheless she contributed to the Party whatever she could.

Computers were never really Doreen's thing. However she did at least see herself on You Tube chairing a lecture given by Hardy in 1987 at Marchmont Street in London: a socialist to the last.

We send our condolences to her daughter, Helen and to her friends and family.

## **Olive D'Arcy**

Olive Edith Blomeley was born in London in 1924 into a working class family. She was the youngest of five siblings, a mere toddler during the 1926 General Strike. Life was not easy for the young Olive. In the days of lighting coal fires to keep the house warm, Olive was given the job of cleaning the grate and polishing it with black lead, never a pleasant job. But Olive was never afraid of hard work. The family had a cat and it was fed on whatever scraps were left over, - no *Whiskas* in those days.

When World War 2 broke out in 1939, Olive had left school and was about 16. She learnt shorthand and touch-typing, and managed to get a job with a food importing firm. Her boss had much respect for her work ethic, and occasionally she would get a package of goodies, a few bananas or oranges, so lacking in the typical diet of the time, with food rationing in action.

On Sundays she and her school friend Mary, would sometimes venture out to collect famous actor's autographs including Laurence Olivier, or to Hyde Park to Speaker's Corner. In about 1945-6 she and Mary went to Hyde Park, where a certain Jim D'Arcy was speaking on behalf of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Jim himself was a conscientious objector, a deserter from the army, having refused to take the medical, and narrowly escaped the military police in Glasgow by climbing out of the back window and going on the run. He was certain that he was not going to fight in any of capitalism's wars. As a trained stone mason, he made his way to London, and soon found plenty of work, repairing the damage caused by German bombs. Jim's dad had been a founder member of the Glasgow Branch of the SPGB, and Jim soon made contact with it, and joined in about 1941.

Jim was speaking on the platform in Hyde Park about 1945 -46, and he got off to woo that good looking girl in the audience! Jim and Olive married in August 1946 and the first son Alan appeared in 1947. The second son Tony appeared in 1948. Olive joined the Socialist Party of Great Britain under her maiden name Blomeley.

Subsequently, she was a devoted socialist until she died. Always one to help with the paperwork, and even to speak on behalf of socialism, probably pre-kids! A regular attender of Branch, E.C. and propaganda meetings she, in her quiet way, built up a lot of respect from her comrades with her hard work and dedication. She can perhaps be forgiven for discussing the TIMES crossword puzzle with our late comrade Hardy before or after a propaganda meetings? Her sons Alan and Tony remain staunch Socialist Party of Great Britain supporters.

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# Object and Declaration of Principles

## Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

## Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against

all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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